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The Reality of Mental Health Among Third-Year Secondary School Students -A Field Study in Selected High Schools in the Municipality of M'sila-

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***Abstract*—**The study aimed to explore the reality of mental health among third-year secondary school students, considering the variables of gender (male, female) and academic stream (Natural Sciences, Literature, and Philosophy).

The sample consisted of 150 third-year secondary school students selected randomly. The researcher adopted the descriptive-analytical methodology. The study employed a mental health scale comprising 22 items. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the t-test to examine differences in the hypotheses.

The study findings revealed the following:

- The mental health level of third-year secondary school students is moderate.

- There are no statistically significant differences in mental health among third-year secondary school students based on gender (male, female).

- There are no statistically significant differences in mental health among third-year secondary school students based on academic stream (Natural Sciences, Literature, and Philosophy).

***Keywords*—**health, mental health, third-year secondary school students.

Introduction:

Today, we live amidst cultural, social, and economic transformations that have directly impacted various aspects of our psychological lives and overall human behavior. These changes have contributed to the spread of psychological disorders, traumas, and behavioral issues, affecting individuals' positive relationships, emotional resilience, and psychological and social adjustment. Mental health, being an integral part of overall health, is

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crucial—it is defined as a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own potential, copes effectively with everyday life stresses, works productively and positively, and contributes to their community.

The concept of mental health is closely linked to psychological and social adjustment, particularly during adolescence—a stage characterized by rapid and diverse physical, psychological, and social changes. Adolescents need to adapt to themselves and their surroundings to achieve self-fulfillment, meet their needs, harness their potential, and develop their abilities, enabling them to navigate life's challenges effectively.

Given the importance of mental health in adolescents' lives, their interactions, and their activities, it is essential to provide a supportive environment, address their needs, and resolve challenges that hinder their well-being. Adolescents, as a vulnerable group, require special attention, care, and continuous support to ensure their psychological well-being, free from disorders and psychological difficulties.

The Problem Statement:

The field of mental health has garnered significant attention from scholars and researchers due to its importance, comparable to physical health. Mental health plays a crucial role in shaping well-adjusted individuals capable of handling various life pressures, overcoming challenges, and maintaining harmony with themselves and the society they live in. (Abdulazim, 2010, p. 9)

Mental health enables individuals to fully harness their potential and cope with life's demands and obstacles. Possessing effective coping mechanisms is a key indicator of one's mental well-being. (Tadmari, Fawaz, & Hamieh, 2020, p. 283)

The school, as a primary educational institution, significantly influences students. It provides a platform where students spend substantial time gaining experiences, values, and attitudes that equip them to face life's challenges. Schools contribute to students' psychological well-being by teaching social skills, promoting appropriate behavior, and nurturing their personalities in psychological, intellectual, social, and physical domains.**(Labbad, 2019, p. 2**)

A student's mental health is shaped by numerous factors, including personal attributes, school environment, and the interaction between the student and the school community under cultural influences.

The need for psychological well-being is fundamental, whether at home or school. The latter is particularly crucial as it fosters the student's personality development and prepares future generations. Schools do not solely focus on academic achievement but also emphasize psychological, moral, and social development. (**Hassan, 2022, p. 171**)

Given the importance of mental health in students' lives, interactions, and activities, it is essential to create a supportive environment that promotes psychological well-being while addressing and resolving challenges that may hinder their mental welfare. Adolescents, in particular, represent a vulnerable group requiring ongoing care and support.

Through the researcher's prior experience teaching in secondary schools and interacting with final-year students, it became evident that they face significant pressures, especially as they prepare for the baccalaureate exam. This observation inspired the researcher to undertake this study to explore the mental health levels of third-year secondary school students.

Research Questions:

1. What is the level of mental health among third-year secondary school students?

2. Are there statistically significant differences in mental health levels among third-year secondary school students based on gender (male, female)?

3. Are there statistically significant differences in mental health levels among third-year secondary school students based on academic streams (Natural Sciences, Literature and Philosophy)?

General Hypothesis:

The level of mental health among third-year secondary school students is moderate.

Sub-Hypotheses:

- There are no statistically significant differences in the mental health levels of third-year secondary school students based on gender (male, female).

- There are no statistically significant differences in the mental health levels of third-year secondary school students based on academic streams (Natural Sciences, Literature, and Philosophy).

Research Objectives:

- To identify the level of mental health among third-year secondary school students in the municipality of M'sila.

- To explore the differences in mental health levels among third-year secondary school students based on gender (male, female).

- To examine the differences in mental health levels among third-year secondary school students based on academic streams (Natural Sciences, Literature, and Philosophy).

Significance of the Research:

The significance of this research lies in the qualitative contribution it provides, particularly when compared to previous studies, along with its practical implications in the field of mental health for secondary school students, specifically third-year students preparing for the baccalaureate exam.

The importance of the research is centered on the following points:

- From a scientific perspective, the research provides theoretical frameworks on mental health, including its concept.

- The significance of this research lies in its focus on an important segment of society, third-year secondary students, and the psychological and behavioral problems they encounter in their social environment.

- The topic of students' mental health has garnered the attention of researchers and educators, becoming a current issue, especially with the spread of diseases like the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The findings of this research can be utilized to enhance the mental health levels of secondary school students.

Key terms in the study:

- **Health**: A state of complete physical, psychological, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease. (**Amine, Soufian, and Kamal, 2019, p. 91**)

- **Mental Health**: According to the World Health Organization (1992), mental health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not just the absence of disease or disability. It is also viewed as a positive state existing in an individual, reflected in the harmonious and effective functioning of their psychological processes within the unity of their personality. (**Abdullah, 2009, p. 63**)

- **Operational Definition of Mental Health**: The score obtained by the respondent on the mental health scale used in the study.

- **Third-Year Secondary Students**: Students enrolled in final-year classes in the secondary schools of the municipality of M’sila, preparing to take the Baccalaureate Examination in the Experimental Sciences and Literature and Philosophy streams.

Previous Studies:

Study by Nabil Mansouri (2018):

The study aimed to identify the levels of mental health among secondary school students, focusing on a sample of adolescent students. To achieve this, the descriptive-analytical approach was used on a sample of 200 male and female students, selected randomly. The Zubaidi and Sana Mujul Al-Hazaa (1997) Mental Health Scale was applied. The findings revealed:

- There are moderate levels of mental health among secondary school students.

- There is similarity in the psychological dimension of mental health levels among adolescent students. (**Mansouri, 2018**)

Study by Malika and Lakhdar (2019):

This study aimed to examine the mental health levels of a sample of second-year secondary school students in the city of Laghouat. It also sought to identify differences in mental health levels in light of the variables of gender and academic specialization. The descriptive method was employed, and the study was conducted in several secondary schools in Laghouat on a sample of 464 male and female students. The Mental Health Scale was used, and the SPSS statistical package was utilized for data analysis. The findings revealed:

- Mental health levels among second-year secondary school students in Laghouat were low.

- Statistically significant differences in mental health were found between genders in favor of females.

- No statistically significant differences in mental health were found between students in scientific and literary streams. (**Malika and Lakhdar, 2019, p. 8**)

Study by Mohammed and Said (2023):

The study aimed to explore the relationship between psychological and academic pressures experienced by secondary school students and their mental health levels. To achieve the study's goal, the descriptive method was utilized due to its suitability for the study's nature. The research was conducted on a sample of 378 secondary school students in the city of Ain El-Hadjel, M'sila Province. The findings revealed:

- Both psychological and academic pressure levels, as well as mental health levels, among the study sample were moderate.
- There is a statistically significant negative correlation between psychological pressure scores and mental health levels among secondary school students.
- There is a statistically significant negative correlation between academic pressure scores and mental health levels among secondary school students. (**Khamed and Nouioua, 2023**)

Study Methodology:

This study utilized the descriptive-analytical method due to its suitability for the study's nature.

Study Population and Sample :

The study population consisted of all third-year secondary school students (Experimental Sciences, Literature, and Philosophy streams) of both genders (male and female) enrolled in the third secondary year at secondary schools in Hammam Dalaa Municipality, M'sila, during the 2021/2022 academic year. The sample included 150 students, selected randomly (based on gender and stream).

Study Tools:

The current study relied on one tool:

The Mental Health Scale developed by Kamel Al-Zubaidi and Sana Mujul Al-Hazaa (1997).

Mental Health Scale:

The scale was selected after reviewing various Arabic and international studies, particularly the tool used in the study by Moatasem and Mohammed (2020).

Description of the Scale:

The scale comprises 22 items, with responses designed according to the three-point Likert scale (Always, Sometimes, Never).

Scientific Foundations of the Tool:

1. Scale Validity:

To verify the validity of the scale, the researcher relied on calculating intrinsic validity by determining the square root of the reliability coefficient. The intrinsic validity coefficient reached 0.94, indicating a high degree of validity for the scale.

2. Scale Reliability:

To verify the reliability of the scale, the researcher calculated the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the entire scale. The reliability coefficient was found to be 0.89, which demonstrates a high level of reliability.

Table (01): Reliability of the Scale Using Cronbach's Alpha

Reliability	**Cronbach's Alpha**
Total Scale Score	0.89

Source: Prepared by the researcher, SPSS outputs

Field Application Procedures:

After completing all necessary procedures and verifying the scientific foundations, the researcher distributed the scale to the sample members during the period extending from the first half of March to the end of April. Subsequently, the researcher collected, analyzed, and discussed the results during the first week of May 2024.

Statistical Processing:

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to apply the following statistical methods:

- Means and standard deviations.
- T-test for differences between means.

Presentation and Discussion of the First Question:

What is the level of mental health among third-year secondary school students?

To answer this question, the researcher calculated the means and standard deviations for the items of the mental health scale for third-year secondary school students. A three-level classification scale was used to describe the levels of the means obtained as follows:

- Low: between 1.00 – 1.66
- Medium: between 1.67 – 2.33
- High: between 2.34 – 3.00

The following equation was used to calculate the descriptive range:

Category Length = (Highest Response Weight – Lowest Response Weight) / Number of Classification Categories

Category Length = (3 - 1) / 3 = 0.66

Table No. (02): This table displays the means, standard deviations, and the overall score of the scale.

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Overall Score of the Scale	**2.32**	**0.24**	**Medium**

Source: Prepared by the researcher, SPSS outputs.

It is observed from Table (2) that the level of psychological health among third-year secondary students was moderate, with a mean score of 2.32 and a standard deviation of 0.24. The overall score of the scale, as perceived by the sample members, was moderate. This indicates that the psychological health level of third-year secondary students is moderate, confirming the first hypothesis of the study.

2-2 Presentation and discussion of the second question:

The second question stated:

- Are there statistically significant differences in psychological health from the perspective of third-year secondary students according to the gender variable (male, female)?

To answer this question, the researcher used the T-test to determine the significance of differences between means. The following table presents the results obtained:

Table (03): Results of means, standard deviations, and T-values for differences in psychological health from the perspective of third-year secondary students according to the gender variable.

Variable	Gender	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-Value	Degrees of Freedom	Statistical Significance	Decision
Overall scale score	Male	80	2.37	0.43	2.35	67	0.218	Not Significant
	Female	70	2.35	0.26				

Source: Researcher’s SPSS outputs

The table above indicates a significant similarity between the mean scores for the overall mental health scale from the perspective of third-year secondary school students based on gender (male, female). The mean for males was 2.37 with a standard deviation of 0.43, while the mean for females was 2.35 with a standard deviation of 0.26. This is further supported by the calculated T-test value of 2.35 at 148 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.218. Since the significance value is greater than 0.05, it is considered statistically insignificant.

Therefore, there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups of third-year secondary students in their perspectives, as the means were very close, and no meaningful differences were observed.

Thus, it can be concluded that: "There are no statistically significant differences in mental health from the perspective of third-year secondary school students based on the gender variable (male, female)." Consequently,

the second hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

4-2-2 Presentation and Discussion of the Third Question:

The third question is as follows:

- Are there statistically significant differences in mental health from the perspective of third-year secondary school students based on the specialty (Experimental Sciences, Literature and Philosophy)?

To answer this question, the researcher used the t-test for differences between means, and the table below shows the results obtained:

Table No. (03): Results of the means, standard deviations, and t-value for differences in mental health from the perspective of third-year secondary school students based on the specialty.

Variable	Specialty	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-Value	Degrees of Freedom	Statistical Significance	Decision
Overall scale score	Experimental Sciences	86	2.38	0.73	3.27	148	0.413	Not Significant
	Literature and Philosophy	64	2.33	0.42				

The source: Prepared by the researcher, SPSS outputs.

It can be seen from the table above that there is a significant similarity between the mean scores of the total scale of mental health from the perspective of third-year secondary school students according to the specialty variable (Experimental Sciences, Literature and Philosophy). The mean for the Experimental Sciences group was (2.38) with a standard deviation of 0.73, while the mean for the Literature and Philosophy group was (2.33) with a standard deviation of 0.42. This is confirmed by the calculated T-test value of (3.27) at 148 degrees of freedom, with a significance level of (0.413). This value is not statistically significant because the significance level was greater than 0.05. Therefore, there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups of third-year secondary school students in their perspective, as the means are very close and no significant differences were observed.

Thus, it can be stated that: "There are no statistically significant differences in mental health from the perspective of third-year secondary school students according to the specialty variable (Experimental Sciences, Literature and Philosophy)." Therefore, we conclude that the third hypothesis of the study has been confirmed.

3. Discussion of Results and Interpretation

3.1 Discussion of Results for Hypothesis 1:

After presenting and analyzing the results, the researcher found that the hypothesis was confirmed, as it was clear that the level of mental health among third-year secondary school students was moderate.

This result aligns with the study of (Mansouri, 2018), which showed that the level of mental health among secondary school students was moderate, and also with the study of (Mohamed and Said, 2023).

The researcher attributes this to the age stage of third-year secondary school students, which is characterized by activity and vitality, allowing them to adapt flexibly to various situations.

4.3.4 Discussion and Interpretation of Results for Hypothesis 2:

Based on the results of the differences according to the gender variable (Male, Female) regarding the mental health level from the perspective of third-year secondary school students, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups. The calculated T-value was (2.35), and no meaningful differences were observed. This indicates a close alignment in the perspective of third-year secondary school students regarding mental health as per the overall scale.

These results confirm the absence of statistically significant differences in the level of mental health attributed to the gender variable, thus supporting the hypothesis of the study. However, this result does not align with the study of (Al-Abi and Lakhdar, 2019), which showed statistically significant differences in the level of mental health among secondary school students attributed to gender, favoring females.

The researcher attributes this result to the fact that both males and females share the same psychological environment, as they live in the same geographical area.

3.5 Discussion and Interpretation of Results for Hypothesis 3:

Based on the results of the differences according to the variable of specialty (Experimental Sciences, Literature and Philosophy) regarding the mental health level from the perspective of third-year secondary school students, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups. The calculated T-value was (3.37), and no meaningful differences were observed, indicating a close alignment in the perspective of third-year secondary school students regarding their mental health as per the overall scale.

These results confirm the absence of statistically significant differences in mental health levels from the perspective of third-year secondary school students, attributed to the specialty variable. This supports the hypothesis of the study. These results are consistent with the study by (**Al-Arabi and Lakhdar, 2019**), which showed no statistically significant differences in mental health between students from scientific and literary specialties.

The researcher attributes this result to the fact that both literary and scientific students' mental health was not affected, as it depends on the students' health, cultural, and social awareness, as well as how much attention they give to their psychological well-being.

Conclusions:

The researchers concluded that all hypotheses were achieved:

- The level of mental health among third-year secondary school students is moderate.
- There are no statistically significant differences in mental health among third-year secondary school students attributed to the gender variable (male, female).
- There are no statistically significant differences in mental health among third-year secondary school students attributed to the specialty variable (Experimental Sciences, Literature and Philosophy).

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